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HONORABLE MAYOR AND COUNCIL  
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Mayor Wilson and Members of the Council:

REPORT FROM MAYOR'S TASK FORCE ON EMERGENCY HOUSING FOR THE HOMELESS

INTRODUCTION

The Mayor's Task Force on Emergency Housing for the Homeless was appointed in early November 1983. The original members of the Task Force were: Lt. Charles Norris, Director of the Salvation Army; Ms. Helen Knudson, Assistant Agency Director, Alameda County Social Services Agency; Ms. Ruth Plainfield, Board Member, Traveler's Aid Society of Alameda County; Rev. John Turpin, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church; Rev. James Coleman, Pastor, Center AME Zion; Rev. Carl Bennett, Jr., Mission SAFE; Rev. Mrs. Marie Wingfield, Christian AME Mission; Mr. Walter Mabry, Principal, Dewey High School and Sr. Marie De Porres Taylor, St. Cyril's Church. Subsequent to the original appointment, Robert Chastain, former City of Oakland Housing Manager; Mr. Harold Davis, Executive Director of Oakland Housing Authority; Mr. Dan Lopez of Citicorp Savings; Dr. Isaac Slaughter, Director, West Oakland Mental Health Department and Mr. David Kears, Director of Alameda County Mental Health Department were added to the Task Force. After serving dutifully on the Task Force during its formative stages, Rev. James Coleman, was lost from the Task Force as the result of an untimely death. Task Force member Rev. John Turpin resigned from the Task Force and was replaced by Rev. Donald Seaton of St. Paul's Episcopal Church. Ms. Gloria Taylor of Alameda County has replaced Mr. David Kears.

The Task Force has met at least monthly since its inception and on occasion met to consider emergency matters. Given the nature of the homeless problem, the Task Force has had to entertain emergent homeless problems while at the same time tried to define the nature and scope of the problem. On numerous occasions, groups and individuals have appealed to the Task Force and appeared before the Task Force seeking assistance to emergency problems.

BACKGROUND

The City of Oakland began its examination of the emergency housing of homeless problem in early 1983. The City Manager established an ad hoc Emergency Housing Task Force comprised of representatives from the religious





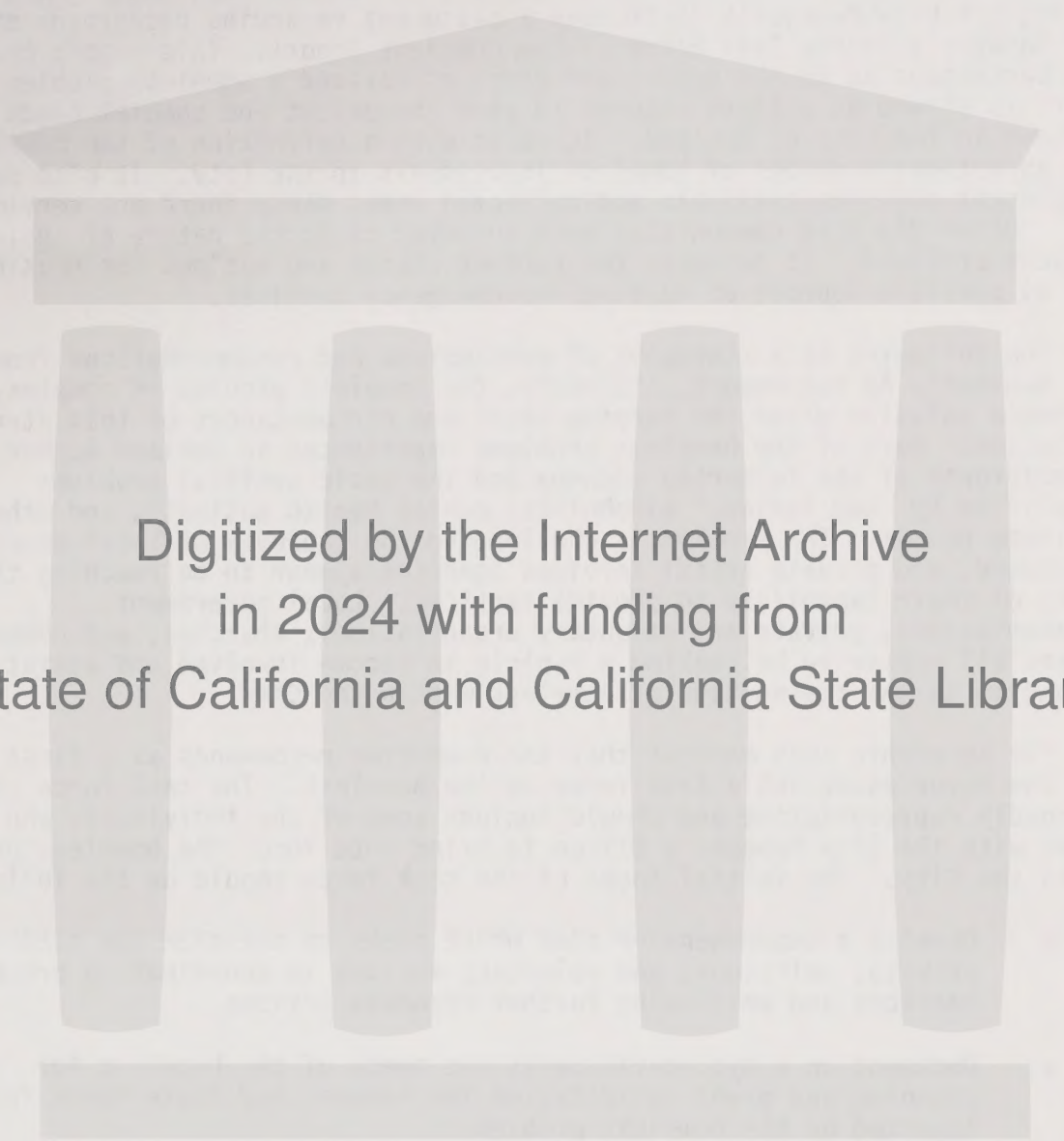
sector, the volunteer sector, Alameda County Social Services, the City of Oakland's Office of Community Development Social Services Department and the City Manager's Office. This ad hoc task force examined the homeless problem and issued its finding in a report from the City Manager to the City Council dated June 7, 1984<sup>3</sup> (See attachment)

The Task Force held its initial meeting on November 30, 1983. At this meeting the City Manager's staff gave a statement regarding background of the City Manager's Ad Hoc Task Force on the Homeless Report. This report provided some background as to the nature and scope of Oakland's homeless problem. The report is viewed as a first attempt to view the extent and special needs of the homeless in the City of Oakland. It dealt with a definition of the homeless as well as estimated number of homeless individuals in the City. It also surveyed the present services available and reflected areas where there are service gaps. Other Bay Area communities were surveyed as to the nature of their homeless problems. It surveyed the current status and outlook for housing as well as possible sources of funding for emergency services.

The following is a statement of conclusions and recommendations from the City Manager's Ad Hoc report. "Clearly, the homeless problem is complex, with no single solution given the varying needs and circumstances of this at-risk population. Part of the homeless problems experienced in Oakland appear to be the outgrowth of the faltering economy and the basic societal problems exemplified by 'bag ladies,' alcoholics, mental health patients, and other destitute people. The problem is challenging the capacity of local government to respond, and private social services agencies appear to be reaching the limits of their capability to provide services. Local government representatives, private and voluntary organizations, churches, and community leaders all appear to be seeking a vehicle to become involved and assist in responding to the rising tide of homeless within the City.

"It is within this context that the committee recommends as a first step that the Mayor establish a task force on the homeless. The task force should be broadly representative and should include some of the individuals who have worked with the City Manager's Office to bring into focus the homeless problem within the City. The initial focus of the task force should be the following:

- Develop a comprehensive plan which seeks to maximize the public/private, religious, and voluntary sectors in coordinating present services and developing further response actions.
- Document on a systematic basis the needs of the homeless for planning and grant solicitation for Federal and State funds for areas impacted by the homeless problem.
- Work on behalf of the City to lobby for State and Federal resources to aid the homeless.



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- Evaluate and recommend to the City actions that would accomplish the following:
  - Expand existing shelter facilities through use of City revenues, including Community Development and Community Services Block Grant resources.
  - Develop new facilities, including use of vacant hotels and military facilities.
  - Improve targeting of health and related supportive services for the homeless.
  - Increase the available stock of low income housing through Federal assistance and evaluation of strategies for retaining present low income residential facilities.
  - Encourage the Department of Defense to provide sufficient housing for military personnel, thereby freeing up assisted housing presently occupied by military personnel."

After listening to the City Manager's presentation of the City's Task Force Report, it was the consensus of the Task Force members that an additional update of current information was needed. Also at this initial meeting, Task Force members expressed a concern that the committee should consider holding public hearings to generate input from the public regarding the problem of the homeless. The Task Force agreed to meet bi-monthly as a means of speeding up the Task Force's efforts to ensure that a report could be generated in a timely manner.

During the initial Task Force meetings a great deal of time was spent examining the definition of emergency shelter. After much discussion, the group adopted a definition provided by the emergency Services Network of Alameda County, "to provide guidance and the necessities of life on a tentative short term basis to individuals or families during a period of disruption, dislocation or emergencies with a view to aid the individual or family in resolving the crisis." From its inception, our Task Force meetings were open to the public. Public testimony was received at each meeting. On many occasions individuals and agency representatives came before the Task Force with specific emergency problems and requested assistance. This assistance ranged from seeking funding as a means of program continuation to seeking funding for the development of new shelter programs. Learning that the Task Force was not going to be allowed to just study the problem but rather expected to be an action group, proposals were entertained and responded to.

Acknowledging that the Task Force was placed in a role of being a facilitator in addressing the needs of the homeless, the following activities





were conducted by the Task Force:

#### MAJOR ACTIVITIES OF THE TASK FORCE

1. The Task Force recommended that \$10,000 be provided to anyone in order to fund bed space that was immediately available. The appropriation of these funds were approved by the City Council which allowed \$7,350 to go to the YMCA and \$1,650 to Peniel Mission and \$1,000 to A SAFE Place. This provided a total of 27 beds.

2. The Task Force recommended and the Council approved \$36,000 to aid in funding an Emergency Services Coordinator to work with the Emergency Services Network (ESN) as well as the Mayor's Task Force.

3. The Task Force endorsed the City of Oakland's application to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Pew Memorial Trust for health care for the homeless grant application in the amount of \$1.4 million. This grant application was coordinated with Alameda County and other agencies interested in the homeless problem. The 50 largest cities in the United States were invited to apply for this grant. The City of Oakland made the first cut and were among the last 24 cities to be evaluated. Due to Oakland's numbers (Oakland having a smaller population than other major cities). Oakland was not selected as one of the final 14 sites that were funded. San Francisco and Los Angeles were the California cities funded for this project.

4. The participation in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Pew Memorial Trust grant application provided the City with invaluable information and data regarding the homeless population. Some of this information will be revealed in the next section of this report.

5. The Task Force received and reviewed proposals from a number of groups seeking to provide housing assistance to the homeless. Of all of the proposals received, the minimum costs for implementing only one of the proposals was a little over \$200,000 per year with a high of nearly \$500,000 a year.

6. The Task Force invited existing shelters to make presentations regarding their program operations and needs. Some of the shelters making presentations were the Salvation Army, A SAFE Place, and Peniel Mission, to name a few.

7. The Task Force held a symposium on December 13, 1984, to hear testimony from existing providers, governmental agencies and the general public. At this symposium presentations were made by Alameda County Probation Department, Alameda County Social Services Department, Alameda County Mental Health Department, Oakland Police Department, Traveler's Aid Society, The Mary Wright Institute, Mr. Warren Widener of Urban Housing Institute, a SAFE Place,





the City's Office of Economic Development and Employment, the City's Social Services Department and the City's Community Development Department, Salvation Army, Kairos Unlimited, and Mr. David Glover of OCCUR. The Task Force took all of the input from the presenters and outlined what the group's perception of the problem was and also conducted worksessions in the afternoon to get the group's perception as to what needed to be done to address the problem.

## FINDINGS

1. The existing shelters are not adequate to meet the needs of the homeless. These shelters are underfunded with many of them facing the imminent possibility of having to either discontinue services or seriously reduce services as a result of shrinking resources. During the course of the Task Force, A SAFE Place, Women's Refuge, Mission SAFE and The Mary Wright Institute appeared before the Task Force, all seeking funds as a means of continuing their services to the homeless. The names mentioned above are not the total number of groups that made requests of the Task Force for funding.

2. The present shelters do not have sufficient beds to cover the needs of the homeless population. The Robert Wood Johnson grant proposal research revealed that Oakland's homeless population is estimated at roughly 3,000 individuals among whom there are three general subgroups: a) chronic homeless individuals--those persons who have also resided within the vicinity of Oakland's Tenderloin or Skid Row streets ("bag people", "derelicts" and other chronically homeless people). b) the institutionalized individuals--those persons released from mental hospitals to the Oakland community. From 1970 to 1984, admissions to California State Hospitals from Alameda County, approximately one-third of whose total population reside in Oakland decreased 95.6% from 3,432 to 150. As "revolving door" treatment received by a relatively new breed of chronically ill mental patients continue to dominate community care due to increasing shortage of appropriate mental health resources, the number of institutionalized homeless people in Oakland continues to grow. c) "New homeless individuals": those persons whose life circumstances are affected by external factors: domestic violence, gentrification and its resulting shortage of low cost available housing, personal crisis, increased housing; forcing reduction in public benefits.

3. Lack of coordination of shelter programs. The Task Force found that there is very little coordination among individuals and groups providing services to the homeless. As a result of this lack of coordination, it has been nearly impossible to get an accurate count of the homeless. In many cases an individual may visit three sites in one day seeking assistance, this is an example of a situation which could allow for an individual to be counted three times when in fact the individual did not actually receive assistance from three agencies. This lack of coordination is also reflected by the fact that there is no central referral point for homeless problems. With the City's





assistance and partial funding of a Coordinator working with the Emergency Services Network of Alameda County, some work has begun in conducting an overall needs assessment of the homeless working with all of member agencies of the Network.

4. Characteristics impacting the homeless in the City of Oakland. The RWJ grant proposal research revealed the following profiles: high unemployment, pronounced poverty, lack of low-cost housing, increasingly high incidence of domestic violence, selection as a target area for newly released State mental patients, and a climate conducive to homeless lifestyle.

- Unemployment: From 1980 to 1982 the unemployment rate for Oakland rose from 7.3 percent to 12.7 percent. While unemployment in Oakland has decreased somewhat to 10.6 percent in the first quarter of 1984, it remains considerably above both the prevailing rate for California (8.6%) and for the nation (8.2%). In addition, the sustained high unemployment of the 1980's has forced many people permanently out of the job market.
- Poverty: According to the 1980 U.S. Census, 18.2 percent of Oakland's population live in poverty. Furthermore, no less than 30.4 percent of the City's population are economically disadvantaged. Forty-nine percent of persons in poverty are age 22 to 44 years: 56 percent are women and 62.9 percent are Black. The median Oakland household income in 1979 was \$13,780.
- Lack of Available Low-cost Housing: Housing shortage for low-income individuals. The Task Force found that there is a chronic shortage of low-income housing in the City of Oakland. This is manifested by the waiting list of over seven thousand individuals for Oakland's Housing Authority's assisted housing. This is also manifested by the number received by the City's Office of Community Development and other departments of individuals seeking some form of low-income housing. The shortage of low-income housing seriously impacts the category of individuals called the "new homeless."

In addition, the Chinatown and Central Community Development District, (the primary area currently serving the homeless) houses the Oakland Convention Center, the City Center Project, Chinatown, and the Victorian Row projects. As a part of these projects, there will be a projected 4.5 million square feet of office space, 850 residential units and 300,000 square feet of retail space -- all to be constructed within the next decade. Cornerstones of a major effort to revitalize Oakland's business and residential districts, these projects alone accounted for a reduction of over 600 housing units, most of which were single room occupancies (SRO's). Currently, the number of available





SRO's in Oakland totals approximately 4,144. In addition to construction of industrial, commercial, and office facilities, the preservation and rehabilitation of residential and office facilities, the preservation and rehabilitation of residential Victorian structures in the downtown target area, also contributes to loss of low-cost housing.

- Rental Increases. Over the past three years, Oakland rents have increased by over 33 percent while the number of foreclosures doubled between 1981 and 1983. As the lack of low-income housing continues to grow while Oakland becomes more and more gentrified, the numbers of homeless in the City continue to swell. Incidents of domestic violence are rapidly increasing within the Oakland Community. The local battered women's shelter--A Safe Place--reports that the number of crisis calls it receives has climbed from an average of 200 per month in 1981 and 260 per month in 1982 to 450 per month in 1983. High unemployment and lack of available low-cost housing have both been cited by battered women's shelter clients as primary reasons for increased violence in Oakland.
- Increase in Domestic Violence. Incidents of domestic violence are rapidly increasing within the Oakland Community. The local battered women's shelter--A Safe Place-- reports that the number of crisis calls it receives has climbed from an average of 200 per month in 1981, and 260 per month in 1982, to 450 per month in 1983. High unemployment and lack of available low-cost housing have both been cited by battered women's shelter clients as primary reasons for increased violence in Oakland.
- "Dumping" from State Mental Hospitals: Since 1970 admissions to California's State mental hospitals have decreased by 52.2 percent from 39,604 to 18,893 in 1980. Admissions from the County of Alameda--approximately one third of whose total population resides in Oakland--decreased 95.6 percent from 3,430 to 150. In lieu of housing previously provided by State hospitals, County psychiatric emergency wards and a limited number of local community mental health facilities bear the burden of sheltering a new breed of chronically mentally ill individuals, the majority of whom have exhausted resources previously supplied by family, friends, and financial assistance from County and State programs.
- Favorable Climate: Because of its relatively mild winters and protracted warm weather seasons, Oakland attracts many homeless individuals who migrate from colder climates. Oakland's temperature ranges from 44°F. to 72.8°F; its average rate of rainfall is 18.08 inches per year.





REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS - Per RWJ Research:

Three major types of life circumstances that account for homelessness in Oakland: unwellness, choice, and displacement due to externally-controlled factors, specifically:

- Unwellness

A person may become homeless because she or he is:

- Mentally ill and

Has been previously/intermittently hospitalized and released with little follow-up, discharge planning, or community aftercare, or

Has never been hospitalized but has exhausted family, friends, and has been deemed too disruptive for board and care homes, shelters, or other housing arrangements, or is

- Chronically alcoholic and/or substance abusing

Lacking money, family, friends or other resources to obtain housing, or is

- A victim of any other specific disease or state of unwellness renders housing unobtainable.

- Choice

A person may become homeless because she or he:

- Has chosen to drop out of society, often coming to Oakland from another state or city after hearing grapevine tales of how survivable street life is "out West," or

- Has chosen to live the traditionally nomadic life of hoboes who grace Oakland's extended rail system.

- Displacement due to externally controlled factors

A person may become homeless because she or he is:

- Unemployed due either to unexpected loss of work or to long-term separation from Oakland's work force, or is

- Unable to secure and retain low-cost housing due to:

Gentrification that has eliminated affordable units and





Rent and mortgage increases that result from rising property values and often lead to eviction, and/or

Increased housing code enforcement, and/or

Other reasons that keep low-cost housing out of reach, or is

- Unable to pay for rent, meals, health care, and clothing with the low levels of AFDC, general assistance, and other public benefits currently available, or is
- Unable or delayed in obtaining public benefits altogether because of lack of address, etc., or
- Has been the victim of domestic violence and seeks a safe place to live yet has no financial resources, or
- Has experienced any other externally-caused life event that results in homelessness.

Typically, as soon as any one of the above reasons for homelessness prevails, an individual is immediately vulnerable to additional numbers of the circumstances listed above. That the numerous causes of homelessness often intermingle is evident; whether a single mother's loss of her job precipitated her mental illness or vice-versa, whether lack of job presented her access to health care, the end result is the same: She and other people who experience similar circumstances are homeless.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the products of the Task Forces' efforts since its inception culminating with a Symposium held on December 13, 1984.

The Oakland Mayor's Task Force on the Homeless recommends to the Mayor and City Council that the City of Oakland address now, and include in their Goal Setting Process, the following objectives which will help to reduce the number of homeless people in Oakland. The recommendations are grouped in the categories of Housing Issues, Emergency Shelter Issues, Coordination Issues, and Funding Concerns.

### Housing Issues

The Oakland Mayor's Task Force on the Homeless recommends that:

1. The City of Oakland place the need for Housing as a Top Action Priority.





- 2a. The City Council place a moratorium on the removal/conversion of low-income housing units. During the moratorium, an ordinance should be passed to preserve the stock of existing single-room-occupancy hotels (thereby regulating their usage).
- 2b. Multiple units (low-income housing) also be regulated by way of City ordinance, with the aim of keeping and increasing the housing stock.
3. In order to proceed with development, a developer must include in his/her plan a way to replace low-income housing stock that would otherwise be removed as a result of development.

#### Emergency Shelter Issues

The Oakland Mayor's Task Force on the Homeless recommends that:

1. The City Planning Commission's General Plan more strongly address the needs of homeless people and Emergency Shelters in the Housing Element.
2. The City of Oakland provide funding for Emergency Shelters in the City, like most other cities do.
3. The City and County join together to plan how to fund and open "A Safe Site" in the City of Oakland.
4. The City of Oakland inventory all existing vacant facilities in order to investigate their potential to house the homeless (e.g., military, schools, industry, etc.)
5. The City of Oakland make available to Mrs. Mary Ann Wright any reasonable structure which might be used to feed and/or shelter the homeless population she currently serves.

#### Coordination Issues

The Oakland Mayor's Task Force on the Homeless recommends that:

1. The City of Oakland approve second year funding for the Emergency Shelter Coordination Project so that the Emergency Services Network can continue the following activities:
  - a) Coordination/Networking with public, private, volunteer, religious, and community agencies.
  - b) Conducting Needs Assessments - defining homelessness, number of homeless, solutions, shelter needs, etc.
  - c) Advocating - to place higher priority on the needs of the homeless (e.g., through State-wide legislation).





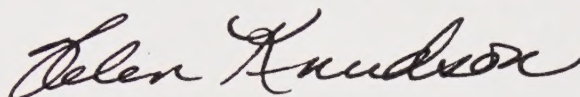
- d) Identifying potential sources of funding and in-kind contributions.
2. The City assign a specific person and/or department within the City to address coordination of the housing/homeless problem. (Social Services Department? Contract it out?)

Funding Concerns

The Oakland Mayor's Task Force on the Homeless recommends that:

1. The City develop a plan to generate revenues (e.g., recruit private sector donations, expand tax base, tax incentives/credits) to assist in providing shelter for the homeless, thus presenting an attractive and humane image for the City of Oakland.
2. The City of Oakland, in conjunction with Alameda County continue seeking funding for the Robert Wood Johnson health care for the homeless grant application. This proposal is for a five-year program to be funded at \$250,000 yearly.

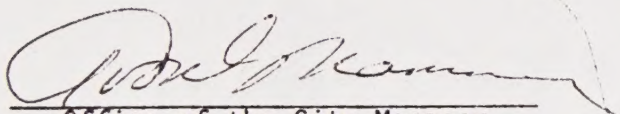
Respectfully submitted,



HELEN KNUDSON

CHAIRPERSON, MAYOR'S TASK FORCE  
ON EMERGENCY HOUSING FOR THE  
HOMELESS

FORWARDED TO THE CITY COUNCIL:

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Office of the City Manager



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